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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 002120

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/21/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#)
SUBJECT: SEA BREEZE 2008 SPARKS CONTROVERSY IN RUSSIA

REF: A. ANKARA 1269
[1](#)B. MOSCOW 1811

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor
Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Sea Breeze 2008 exercises have sparked controversy and heated debate among Russia's politicians and defense experts. GOR officials characterized them as "anti-Russian" in nature and contend that demonstrations against the exercises were evidence of the Ukrainian population's opposition to NATO membership. Experts believed the exercises were intended to bring Ukraine closer to NATO membership, and, as such were seen as a deliberate provocation toward Russia. The Russian media continues to exaggerate reports of Ukrainian protests as it maintains its campaign against NATO enlargement. End Summary.

The GOR Reacts Harshly

[1](#)2. (C) FM Lavrov's complaint to Turkish officials (ref A), that the NATO-PFP Sea Breeze 2008 exercises in the Black Sea were counter to the goal of promoting humanitarian and emergency cooperation was repeated in a harsh July 18 MFA statement calling the exercises "anti-Russian." The MFA questioned why the Black Sea would be chosen for exercises that included hunting enemy submarines, repelling enemy attacks, and assault landings. The statement pointed to Ukrainian protests as proof that Kiev was not ready for closer integration with NATO.

Experts Fear Ukrainian NATO Accession

[1](#)3. (C) Experts such as Deputy Editor-In-Chief of the weekly Independent Military Overview Viktor Litovkin and Izvestia political analyst Dmitriy Litovkin said that the Sea Breeze 2008 exercises posed a threat to Russia, but only because they were another example of Ukraine's growing relationship with NATO. They dismissed press reports that stated the exercises threatened Russia militarily, arguing that Russia participates in naval exercises with NATO such as Active Endeavor. Instead, they insisted, the real threat to Russia was that NATO warships might one day have a permanent base along Ukraine's coast.

[1](#)4. (C) Carnegie Center's Dmitriy Trenin told us on July 23 to expect a sharpening of rhetoric over Ukrainian MAP. Reiterating his earlier warnings (ref B) over the scope of the crisis presented by NATO's possible expansion to Ukraine, Trenin commented that the GOR viewed Sea Breeze as creating facts on the ground, with the nature of the exercises reinforcing the Bucharest Summit's assertion of Ukraine's ultimate membership. Noting his own efforts to understand

the depth of Russian neuralgia over NATO, Trenin posited that it was less a problem with NATO, than with the "degree of sovereignty" perceived to be exercised by its members. While Russia had no doubts over German or Turkish sovereignty - and willingness to stand up to the U.S. in a dispute over principles - it did not treat the sovereignty of "new Europe," much less Ukraine, seriously. In the Russian view, Trenin argued, the U.S. was acquiring a huge platform to use as it saw fit and so the question arose "why does the U.S. want a large platform so close to Russian borders." Against this backdrop, Trenin commented, press leaks of a resumption of long-range bombers to Cuba was a form of "psy-ops." Russians are frustrated, he noted, by the failure of U.S. officials to comprehend the strategic threat posed by NATO expansion.

A Political Affront to Russia

15. (U) During a press roundtable, Russian State Duma Deputy Sergei Markov questioned the motives of Sea Breeze 2008. He argued that Russia and NATO conducted exercises that focused on counterterrorism or that had humanitarian and peacekeeping goals. Sea Breeze 2008, he argued, was clearly an exercise designed to increase the Ukrainian military's interoperability with NATO. Russia and NATO would never conduct such an exercise, he said. Russia and Ukraine had an equal relationship with NATO, so the activities they conducted with NATO ought to be similar. Markov then asserted that Russia was the sole guarantor of Ukrainian sovereignty (sic).

16. (U) Member of the Council on Russian National Strategy and Deputy Director of the CIS Institute Vladimir Zharikin agreed, arguing that Sea Breeze 2008 elevated Ukraine's relationship with NATO beyond the Russia-NATO relationship. Russia conducted exercises when they were advantageous to Russian interests and national security, whereas Ukraine hosted them to boost its chances of acceding to NATO. He added that the military exercises with Ukraine exposed the contradictions in NATO's argument that a political organization of "democratic, civilized countries" does not threaten anyone. Zharikin stressed that if Ukraine conceivably wanted to join the Alliance to defend itself from Russia, as the exercises on the Black Sea were supposedly designed to do, then NATO was inherently an "anti-Russian political club."

Russia Media Focus On Ukrainian Demonstrations

17. (C) Russian media and the MFA made much of the Ukrainians who protested against the Sea Breeze 2008 exercises, claiming that large mass demonstrations occurred, with exercise participants from NATO warships forced to board three protesting ships. The MFA pointed to these reported demonstrations as proof that most Ukrainians are opposed to NATO. Reports from the area indicate that media reports were heavily exaggerated, but feed into the Russian drumbeat of opposition to NATO enlargement.

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